THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHR1 DINSHA J. PATEL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The price of Administered Price Mechanism (APM) gas is decided by the Government. The price of gas produced under pre-NELP contracts is determined in terms of the provisions of the Production Sharing Contract between Government and the Joint Venture Consortium. As regards the gas from NELP fields, prior approval of Government has to be obtained for the formula or the basis on which the price is fixed. Price of Liqiefied Natural Gas (LNG) imported under term contracts is governed by the Sale Purchase Agreement between the LNG seller and the buyer. Spot cargoes are purchased on mutual agreeable commercial terms.

Taxes on petrol and diesel

2452. MS. SUSHILA TIRIYA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a proposal to cut taxes on petrol and diesel;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether consumers have to bear the burden of the increasing crude oil prices; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI DINSHA J. PATEL): (a) and (b) In the Union Budget 2008-09, the *ad-valorem* component of excise duty on unbranded petrol and unbranded diesel has been abolished and converted to a specific duty of Rs. 14.35 and Rs. 4.60 per litre respectively, with effect from 1.3.2008.

(c) and (d) The international prices of crude oil and petroleum products have remained high and volatile since 2004. As passing on the entire impact of the increase in the oil prices to the consumers would have resulted in acute hardship to the common man, the retail selling prices of sensitive petroleum products namely petrol, diesel, domestic LPG and PDS kerosene have not been increased in tandem with the international oil prices. Due to this, the Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are incurring under-recoveries on domestic sale of these sensitive petroleum products. To deal with the steep escalation in international oil prices, the Government has adopted the principle of "equitable burden sharing" between the Government, the oil PSUs and consumers to protect the interests of the common man and vulnerable sections of society, as also the financial health of OMCs.

In this context, the Government has made a marginal increase in petrol and diesel prices by Rs. 2/litre and Re. 1 /litre respectively with effect from 15.2.2008, which is actually in the nature of a restoration of the retail prices of these products to the price level operating before February, 2007. Even after this, it is estimated that the OMCs have suffered under-recoveries of over Rs. 70,000 crore on the sale of these products during 2007-08. Despite the steep increase in the international oil prices, the prices of domestic LPG and PDS Kerosene have not been increased since November, 2004 and March, 2002 respectively. The Government has issued Oil Bonds and the Upstream Oil Companies have also contributed by offering discounts on crude oil and petroleum products to partially compensate the under-

recoveries of OMCs and to protectthe consumers from the adverse effect of rising international oil prices.

Difficulty in the purchase of Ethanol

2453. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that oil companies like to use Ethanol in place of petrol but they are facing practical problems in purchasing ethanol;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps Government would take to uniform the purchase system in all the States?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI DINSHA J. PATEL): (a) to (c) At present there is 5% blending of ethanol with petrol. Oil Marketing Companies are procuring ethanol from indigenous producers through open tenders with validity for three years extendable by two more years. As against industry's requirement of 180 crore litres of ethanol for a period of three years, the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have been able to contract 140.4 crore litres and they have so far procured 29.5 crore litres under the programme (as on 31.03.2008). However, the difficulty in the purchase of ethanol is due to levies/taxes on ethanol imposed by the different States. The matter has been taken up with the concerned State Governments to reduce/remove the duties and taxes on ethanol meant for doping with petrol. Some of the States like Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand have recently exempted/reduced the import and export fee.

Damage to Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya

2454. SHRI PRAVEEN RASHTRAPAL: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware about grave damage to Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, the world famous Buddhist pilgrimage place;

(b) if so, what action is taken by Government to protect and preserve the sacred Bodhi tree;

(c) whether it is a fact that criminal cases are filed for such actions against officials of Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM (SHRIMATIAMBIKA SONI): (a) and (b) As reported by Government of Bihar, an investigation was carried out by Forest Research Institute, Dehradun regarding damage to Bodhi Tree. As per their report, it appears that the cut on Bodhi Tree is more than three years old. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Bodhi Temple Management Committee and Forest Research Institute, Dehradun for future maintenance and management of the Bodhivriksha.

(c) and (d) A Complaint No. 850/2007 has been filed by Shri Arup Brahmachari Swamiji in the Civil Court. The case is pending in the Court.